DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 554 EA 030 805

AUTHOR	Kronley, Robert A.
TITLE	Southern Synergy: The Columbia Group, Business and Education Reform.
INSTITUTION	BellSouth Foundation, Inc. Atlanta, GA.
PUB DATE	2000-04-00
NOTE	56p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.bellsouthfoundation.org//pubs/index.asp.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; Accountability; Educational Change; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; *Financial Support; *Public Policy; Public Schools; *School Business Relationship; *Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

The Columbia Group is a network of nine state-based organizations that are committed to promoting education reform. Each of these organizations exists and works in a specific and unique environment. Group members are essentially small nonprofit organizations with full-time staffs. The significant success that Columbia Group organizations have had in influencing state policy on behalf of an education reform agenda is not a result of having large staffs or substantial resources, but rather a product of their creativity in transforming relatively small private investments into activities that benefit the public good. This documents provides a snapshot of each of the Columbia Group organizations. These portraits of the network members also demonstrate how the organizations have often adopted similar means to deal with education reform issues. (DFR)

Southern Synergy: The Columbia Group, Business and Education Reform

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In partnership with business, almost all Southern states have now made education reform a central element of their public policy agendas. The work of Columbia Group organizations has been key to this.

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Southern Synergy: The Columbia Group, Business and Education Reform

Columbia Group organizations are distinct in that they have taken a general business interest in improved education and out of it crafted coherent and vital education reform programs

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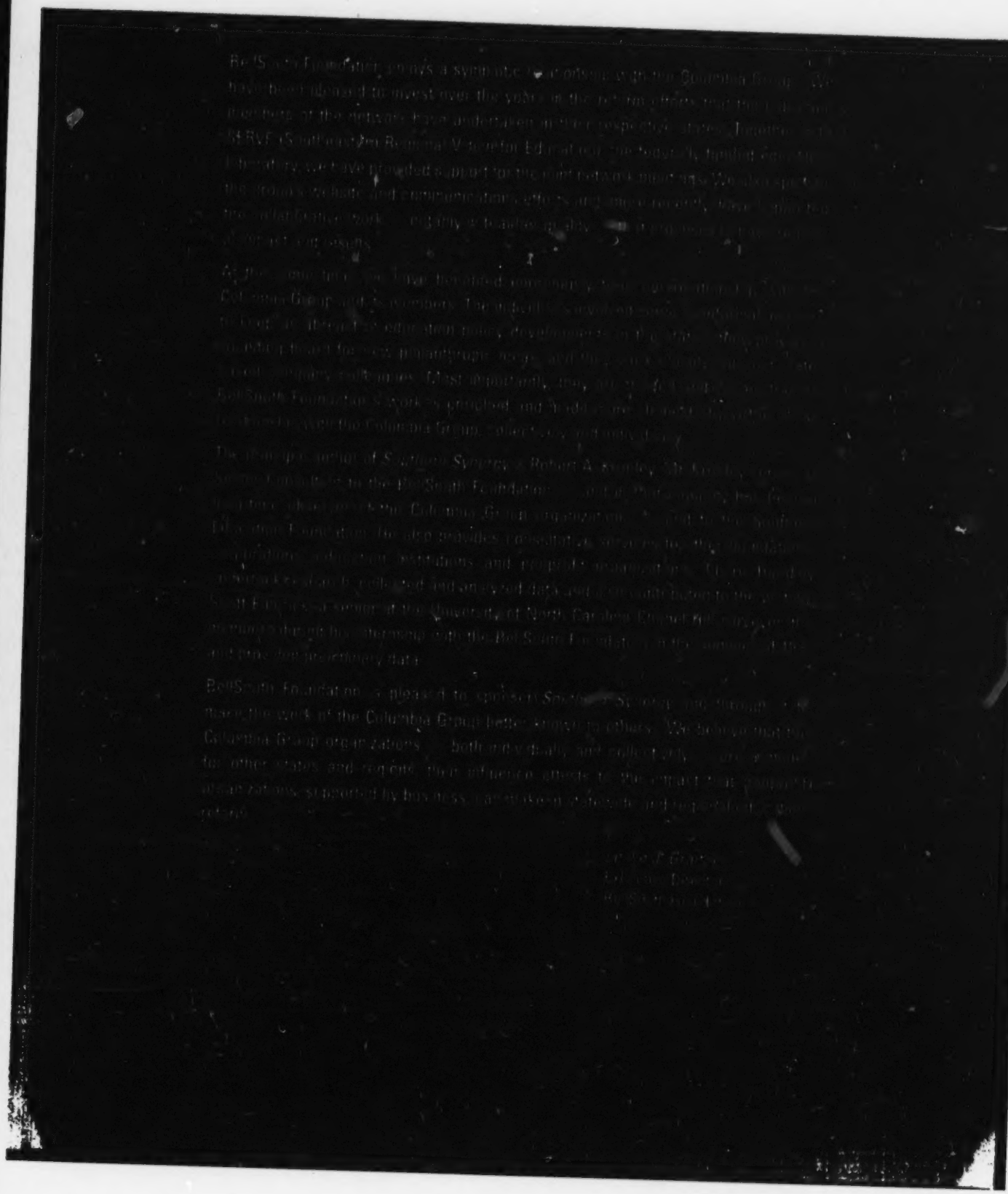

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The South Comes of Age

The story of the South in the last three decades of the twentieth century is one of dramatic transformation. This story continues, and its ending cannot be fully forecast because there is a long way to go and much to do before the region finally roots out the remnants of racial separation, poor education and underdevelopment that plagued it for so long. Nevertheless, the South has made remarkable progress and the arc of change is overwhelmingly positive. New investment has energized the region and with a flourishing economy have come urbanization, diversity, and cultural revitalization. Once distinguished primarily for enforcing disabling distinctions based on race, places in the South today are celebrated for interracial collaboration. A region long mocked for insularity and defensiveness now confidently pursues the challenges and opportunities offered by global competition.

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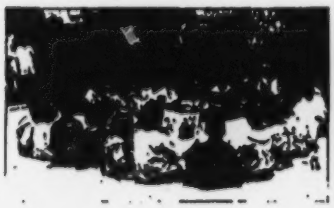
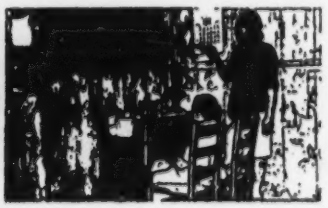
There are many reasons for the emergence of the modern South. Primary among them is the successful demand for civil rights, resulting in a reversal of law, policy and custom that forever changed the ways Southerners live, work, learn, vote and play. These changes provided the framework for opportunity; they also unlocked the region to the outside world.

Shifts in formal context, however, no matter how fundamental, do not by themselves account for the region's extraordinary growth. The right of all citizens to participate in a new social and economic system is an empty promise unless they have the skills to do so. In the South of the not so distant past, few citizens, of whatever race, were so endowed. Forever underfunded, regarded as having scant value in the region's traditional economy, bloodied in battles over desegregation and abandoned by many as a result of them, public education in the South was inadequate to produce graduates with the proficiency to meet the demands of a new economy or the facility to participate fully in a more inclusive society. Positive change would come only as education improved.

The last two decades have seen concerted effort at reform. One aspect of the push for educational improvement is unique to the South — the activities of a group of organizations that are dedicated to reforming education policy and practice in the nine states in which they are located. Each of these organizations receives a substantial amount of its support from the business community, which was alarmed by the quality of education the South's students were receiving and consequently called for efforts at comprehensive change. Building on significant successes in their respective states, these organizations have created an informal network, called the Columbia Group, through which they share strategies and occasionally collaborate on programs that have region-wide impact.

The creation and activities of the various Columbia Group organizations, with their strong support from elements of the business community, reflect the convergence of private interest and public need. Education reform in the region is the key element in the South's ongoing attempts at modernization, efforts that became increasingly focused and urgent in the years of economic stagnation and recession following major confrontations over civil rights.





This sense of urgency to improve education in the South was late in coming. For years, underdevelopment and overdependence on a few crops were abiding elements of the southern economy. In the wake of the Civil War, the Northeast and the Midwest underwent rapid and dramatic industrialization and markedly increased urbanization. The South remained rooted in its traditional agricultural pursuits. Cotton and tobacco dominated the agricultural economy and much of the existing industry (textiles, for example) was connected to these crops.

From the post-Civil War years through the first decades of the twentieth century, the agricultural economy was closely intertwined with political leadership, which saw little benefit in promoting or investing in the industrialization that was taking place elsewhere. Industrialists who located in the South sought freedom from regulation, something that the South eagerly provided. What limited industrialization there was relied more on the strength of strong backs than on the craft of skilled hands.

By the 1920's, the efforts of a few political and business leaders to promote industry did result in some diversification of the South's economy. Most economic activity, however, remained primarily agricultural or reliant on industries that used the region's abundant natural resources and cheap labor. In the short term, through the Depression, this lack of economic diversity did not necessarily harm the region. Because the South's economy was more reliant on those activities that produced necessities — food and clothing — than other, more industrialized regions of the country, the impact of the Depression was somewhat less in the South than elsewhere. Southern families were *already* poor.[1]

Like the rest of the country, the South's economy benefited from World War II, which generated an industrial boom. Even then, though, industries in the South tended to rely on a large, unskilled labor force and employed few people with specific skills or trades.

Following the war, the South went through a period of economic growth. There was continued industrialization and some diversification of business, but the southern economy continued to be characterized by agriculture and mining and reliant on unskilled and cheap labor. This period of growth continued basically until the recession of the 1970s, which hit the South especially hard. The failure of the region to make significant investments in its education systems and other social infrastructures meant that its people had fewer resources to turn to.

1. James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development 1936 - 1980.* Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

The creation and activities of the various Columbia Group organizations, with their strong support from elements of the business community, reflect the convergence of private interest and public need. Education reform in the region is the key to the South's ongoing attempts at modernization.

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The Educational Context

Southern states did not make significant investments in education because they did not think they were necessary. At the start of the 20th century, public education in the South was a precarious enterprise, dependent on the whims of local community leaders and the demands of farming. Most schools were rural, one-room schoolhouses. Teachers were poorly trained — typically young and female with little education beyond secondary — and poorly paid. The school year was dependent on the demands of farming, and it was not unusual for it to last just three or four months. Schools were, of course, segregated and, as poor as conditions were for white students, they were deplorable for black students.

While these conditions were not unique to the South, by the end of the 19th century other regions were beginning to make significant changes in public education. These were driven largely through the progressive movement, which valued efficiency and professionalization. Reformers saw education as a key to improving the South's economy, not necessarily through industrialization or diversification but rather through the application of innovative, science-based agricultural methods.[2]

A key strategy of reformers for improving education was consolidation of heretofore local, independent one-room schoolhouses into newly established school districts. Professionals — individuals trained specifically in managing and teaching in schools — would staff these districts. Curriculum would be examined and there were calls for teachers to move away from traditional teaching methods of lecturing and rote recitation of facts. The drive for consolidation and professionalization eventually resulted in the creation of oversight agencies, the predecessors of state departments of education. It also led to the creation of departments or schools of education at state universities.

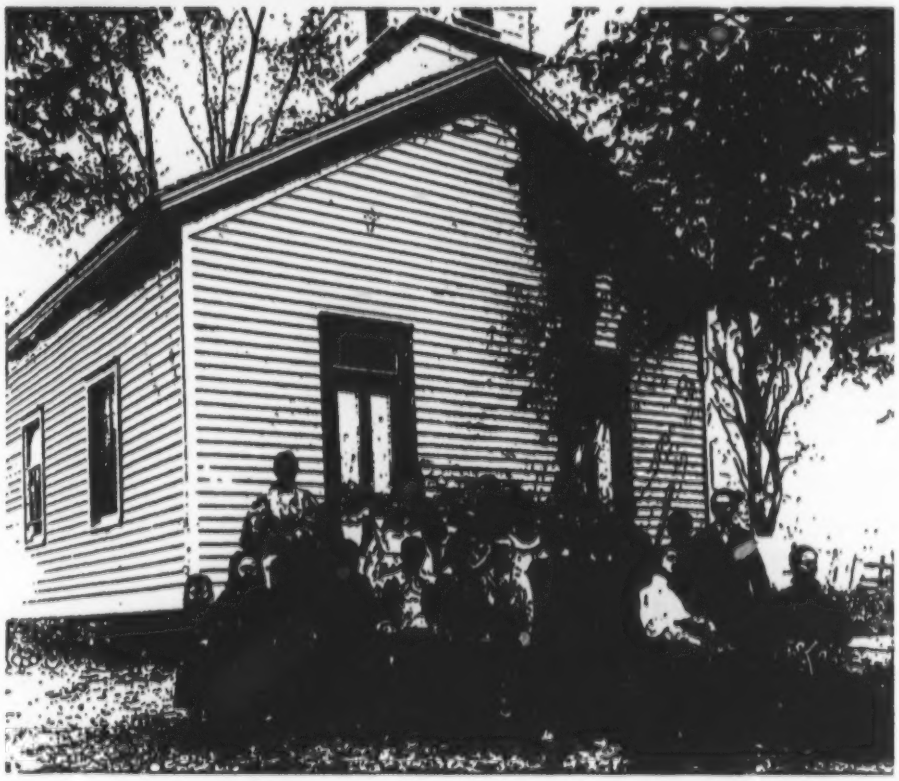
Progressive reformers did not challenge the segregated system of public education. Their advocacy of better qualified and better paid teachers, professionally run schools and consolidation, did not extend to teaching black children the same things as white children. Expected to be the backbone of the South's unskilled or low-skilled workforce, black children were taught domestic, agricultural and industrial skills.

By 1950, each southern state had developed two centralized systems of public education where a few decades earlier there had been none. Despite this reform, it remained clear that the quality of education provided by these systems did not match that offered in states outside the region. Southern students — white and black alike — continued to lag behind their peers elsewhere in the country.

By the mid-1950s, the South was consumed by the fight to secure civil rights. Education was at the heart of efforts to desegregate the region and ensure equal rights for all citizens. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education* drew public attention to the need for black children to have access to better facilities, better materials, stronger curricula and better prepared teachers. *Brown* and the cases that followed it stressed the importance of access and equity for all students, but did not speak to the overall quality of the schools or to the expectations that citizens should have for their educational systems. While *Brown* declared legal segregation unconstitutional, many school districts remained or became segregated in fact as white families fled urban districts and settled in racially homogeneous enclaves.

Through the 1970s, many southern leaders, reluctant to change the old order, generally did not use the changes affected by *Brown* and subsequent cases to invest in educational improvement. The business community was, for the most part, silent. The continued controversy over desegregation made business leaders wary of any association with education. In many places, they curtailed their traditional involvement on school boards and, despite a growing recognition of the importance of education to economic growth, refrained from advocating for school improvement.

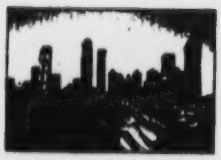
2. *Progressivism and Rural Education in the Deep South: 1900 - 1950*, Spencer J. Maxcy.
Education and the Rise of the New South. Ronald K. Goodenow and Arthur O. White, ed. G.K. Hall & Co., Boston, MA 1981.



The wounds incurred in the battles over desegregation, a painful recession and uninspired leadership did little to improve education or the economy in most southern states. It took a new generation of governors, beginning in the mid-seventies and reaching a critical mass during the ensuing decade, to initiate comprehensive efforts at education reform. These governors took pains to disassociate themselves from those actions of their recent predecessors that widened the region's racial divide. Determined to be seen as progressive, they linked progress to economic growth and the promise of new prosperity. They were quick to grasp the key role that education would play in realizing this vision, and they provided the impetus for the wave of state-based education reform that swept the country in the 1980s. Education reform in Mississippi predated the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk*. South Carolina and Tennessee soon followed; other southern states were not far behind.

These early efforts at education reform sought to increase what students learned by raising high school graduation requirements and by introducing new assessment measures. These were tied to increased expenditures on schools and teachers. Additional revenue was needed to fund these investments. Reform-minded governors, in convincing state legislatures and citizens to back the increases and the new taxes that often went with them, relied heavily on the business community for support. Business leaders were recruited to give credence to the argument that better education was essential if states were to avoid stagnation. In many instances, they also spearheaded the reform effort.

These alliances with the business community proved effective in many southern states. They also legitimized the important stake that the private sector had in successful public education. The region had attracted new economic actors; their dependence on effective education was more than a slogan. New industries wishing to locate in the South, where costs were significantly less, needed to assure highly-skilled employees that the schools awaiting their children were as good as the ones they were being asked to leave. Future employees would be graduates of these schools. Customers were being asked to purchase increasingly sophisticated and expensive products.



The business interest in education was not only palpable, it was also permanent. Governors and legislatures would come and go, their commitment to education waxing and waning, but business, faced each day with the need to do better or disappear, could not abandon the region's schools.

Business involvement with education grew out of enlightened self-interest and, over the last two decades, has taken different forms. It has evolved from providing materials and volunteers to individual schools, to concern about state education policy. Business efforts to influence education policy grew out of a realization that improving education is a dynamic process requiring varied strategies. To be effective would require a new set of skills that include detailed knowledge of educational issues, political dexterity, and communications proficiency. To do it well would necessitate the services of a professional staff beyond that which business could provide from its own ranks. Many businesses, therefore, invested in the creation of public policy organizations that could act on behalf of the business community and other private citizens to promote specific education reforms.

The business interest in education was not only palpable, it was also permanent. Governors and legislatures would come and go, their commitment to education waxing and waning, but business, faced each day with the need to do better or disappear, could not abandon the region's schools.

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The state-based organizations that later became the Columbia Group were created at different times and took different forms. In the 1980s and 90s, they developed specific agendas that responded to the contexts in which they operate. They had notable successes — and a few setbacks — in influencing policies that have promoted an education reform agenda. During this period, each organization worked separately, with some awareness of, but little interaction with, the others.

That changed in 1995, when representatives of six of the organizations attended a meeting in Columbia, South Carolina on school partnerships hosted by SERVE (Southeastern Regional Vision for Education), the federally-funded lab for the region. Informal discussions revealed significant common interests and concerns, and the group decided to gather again to focus in more detail on these issues. This second meeting was notable for the instant camaraderie that sprung up among the participants, who identified and discussed approaches to several recurrent issues and explored how lessons learned in one state might advance strategies in another. Out of this gathering came a consensus that informal convenings of the group would have real value for the organizations and might, over time, extend beyond sharing individual experiences to confronting regional educational issues. To memorialize its first get-together, the network named itself the Columbia Group.

Since its inception, membership in the Columbia Group has grown to nine. The group meets twice each year for intensive discussions of the status of reform in the various states, of regional trends, and of effective strategies to promote education improvement. Beyond substantive exchanges, the meetings provide an opportunity for individuals on the frontline of sometimes bruising struggles to connect with colleagues in a mutually supportive environment.

It is an environment that has been created and nurtured by members of the network themselves. The Columbia Group has no office, there is no staff, and there are few resources or budget to support its activities. It exists because it adds real value to the work of its members, who invest time, energy and their own resources to ensure its viability. What little outside help the Columbia Group gets comes from three sources. The BellSouth Foundation, a company-sponsored philanthropy that exemplifies the business commitment to education reform, underwrites certain of the meeting costs, provides support for electronic communications for the association, and has made grants to some of the member organizations for state-based work. SERVE has also provided support for meetings and commissioned collaborative work from members of the group. Finally, the Public School Forum of North Carolina, the network member whose president, John Dornan, initially convened the group, continues to coordinate meetings with support from SERVE, oversees electronic communications, publishes a network newsletter and serves as the conduit for research funds for the group.

In the last two years, the Columbia Group has experimented with two efforts to work jointly on a specific education issue. One of these concerned charter schools; the other focused on the quality of teaching in the region and led to a publication and support for a new Southeast Center on Teacher Quality.

Whether the Columbia Group's joint efforts represent a new template for ongoing concerted education reform activities across the region or an occasional strategic initiative is not yet clear. What is certain, though, is that the Columbia Group and it members provide a uniquely southern and particularly effective contribution to education reform. The region's long disregard of the importance of education, its need to transform itself, and the central role of business in this transformation have all played a part in the creation of these state-based organizations dedicated to education reform. Given the shared histories and geographical proximity of these states, it is not surprising that these education reform organizations in the South are considering a host of common issues and in doing so finding common barriers to progress. The work of the Columbia Group and its members offers the possibility of common and useful solutions. This report considers that work.

What is certain, though, is that the Columbia Group and its members provide a uniquely southern and particularly effective contribution to education reform.

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The Columbia Group is a network of nine state-based organizations that are committed to promoting education reform. Each of these organizations exists and works in a specific and unique environment. The issues that each confronts, the problems that each encounters and the solutions that each proposes and advocates all arise out of a set of constantly changing conditions, and all present variations on the theme of reform as it is being played out in one state.

The Columbia Group exists to enable its members to consider common concerns, share ideas, explore promising practices, identify emerging issues, and strategize about the most effective ways to promote educational policy and practice that will transform teaching and learning in their states. Perhaps just as significantly, the network offers its members a safe space — a respite from the continuing struggle to rally diverse constituencies around a common agenda for change.

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Columbia Group members do not follow any particular organizational template. Two are affiliates of Chambers of Commerce; the remainder have independent boards of directors. Two are membership organizations, and one has local chapters throughout the state. One places little reliance on volunteers, two others rely upon them to great extent, while the others use them occasionally.

Columbia Group members are essentially small non-profit organizations with full-time staffs ranging from a high of eighteen to a low of two. The average number of full-time employees for a Columbia Group organization is six. Seven of the nine organizations make use of part-time employees (typically two), and three organizations avail themselves of interns.

The significant success that Columbia Group organizations have had in influencing state policy on behalf of an education reform agenda is not because they have large staffs or substantial resources. They have been successful because of their creativity in transforming relatively small private investments into activities that benefit the public good. All of the Columbia Group members work in states that have only in the last two decades, and to widely varying degrees, grasped and acted upon the idea that improved education for all citizens is central to the state's economic viability. Despite the power and validity of this idea, it is still not universally accepted. Columbia Group organizations realize that an abiding element of their work is to reinforce this notion in highly volatile political climates.

As a result of this deep understanding of, and connection to, the environment in which it works, each organization has chosen to engage education reform issues on the state, as opposed to local, level. In doing so, each has gone considerably beyond urging the state simply to support public education to promoting specific approaches that will fundamentally improve education. And, in these approaches, each seeks lasting improvement through the broad sweep of policy change.

Consequently, each of the organizations, through public education, media campaigns, communications or lobbying, attempts to influence public opinion about the content and effectiveness of educational policies and practices. All of the organizations present constituencies with regular updates on their work: six of the nine organizations have periodic newsletters; two put out a regular magazine; and five distribute annual reports.

Two organizations rely on op-ed pieces, while another presents its views in a monthly newspaper column and works closely with education reporters in exploring and defining issues in the state. One holds regular seminars for education reporters to provide them with a deeper understanding of education issues in the state. Each of the organizations has a web site and uses to an increasing extent electronic communications.

Each member of the Columbia Group relies significantly, if not exclusively, on private sector support to grapple with major education reform issues. These issues, in their scope and importance, go beyond the borders of any one state and resonate throughout the region. As a result, the work of one member of the group often becomes the concern of all.

The remainder of this section provides a snapshot of each of the Columbia Group organizations. A full description of the totality and richness of each organization's work is beyond the scope of this report. These portraits of the network members also demonstrate how the organizations have often adopted similar means to deal with education reform issues.

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A+ Education Foundation of Alabama

Background & Creation: A+ Education Foundation was founded in 1991 by two members of Leadership Alabama, Bill Smith and Caroline Novak, who were concerned about the state's public schools. A+'s founders recognized the need for a non-partisan group to bring attention to and advocate for better public schools. In the early 90's, A+ convened a group of committed leaders from all sectors — educational, political and business — to develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen Alabama's public schools. To promote the plan and to gather input, A+ held 22 town meetings with over 25,000 Alabamians participating. Attempts to move the plan forward, however, were crushed by gubernatorial politics and opposition to standards-based reform that was then occurring across the nation. Instead of seeing this setback as a reason to quit, A+ officers and staff rallied and saw the initial defeat as an opportunity to grow stronger and ultimately prevail by working for long-term, systemic reform in Alabama. A+ has since evolved into a dynamic organization that emphasizes collaboration, communication, and capacity-building to deal with central issues in education reform.

Educational Issues Addressed:

- Teacher Quality
- Student Achievement
- Accountability
- School Finance

Programs:

A+ is actually two organizations — the A+ Coalition for Better Education and the A+ Education Foundation. The Coalition is an advocacy organization and lobbies the legislature on school improvement issues. The Foundation's programs fall into five general categories: capacity-building with the education community to improve student achievement; work with policymakers to improve student achievement; research; communications; and networking.

Capacity Building:
Alabama Reading Initiative

The Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) is a research-based comprehensive program developed by the State Department of Education to provide teachers with on-going training, information and support to enable them to be more effective in teaching students how to read and how to increase their comprehension and writing skills. A+ President Caroline Novak serves on the Steering Committee and raised over $1.2 million in private dollars for use in the first two years of the program. A+'s involvement is focused on development of an effective model for staff development, incorporating research on reading, staff development and whole school reform. Distinctive characteristics of the ARI include an emphasis on K-12, an active partnership with higher education, an emphasis on developing capacity within local systems to continue and expand on the initial two-week training and a goal of 100 percent literacy.

Working with Policymakers

A+ staff and officers meet regularly with policymakers involved in education decision-making, including the Governor and his staff, the state Superintendent of Education and his staff, state board of education members and key legislators. A+ provides these policymakers with research, information about best practices and resources to help them make better decisions. Additionally, A+'s officers, executive committee and staff have worked jointly with policymakers on projects such as the Task Force on Teaching and Student Achievement, the Governor's Commission on Teaching Quality (Title II), and the Governor's Commission on Instructional Improvement and Academic Excellence.

Research

Sound research is the foundation for A+'s programs. A+'s Education Research Task Force commissions the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama and other consultants to produce papers on a variety of issues including equity and adequacy, standards and assessments, school readiness, as well as several briefing papers for the Governor. Additionally, A+'s Task Force on Teaching and Student Achievement produced a comprehensive report on teacher quality, *Teaching and Learning: Meeting the Challenge of High Standards in Alabama*, which has become the cornerstone of the work of several committees and commissions in Alabama.

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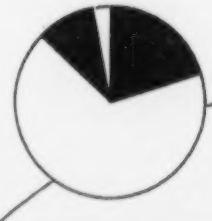
Funding:

The business sector, either through contributions or corporate foundation grants, is the primary source of A+'s support.



20% Corporate contributions for general and project support
67% Project funding from corporate foundations
10% Personal contributions and/or membership revenue
3% other

Chief Executive and Organizational Structure:

Caroline Novak has served as President of A+ since co-founding it in 1991. Previously, Ms. Novak spent 17 years as a volunteer, focusing on education and leadership-related organizations. Cathy W. Gassenheimer is managing director of A+. Before joining A+ in 1991, Ms. Gassenheimer served as Communications Director for the Business Council of Alabama. She has an extensive background in public policy.

A+ is unique among Columbia Group members in that decision-making is shared to a great degree with its executive committee, which includes a school superintendent, a college of education dean, an early childhood researcher, a Headstart director, and the director of a public policy institute. Bill Smith, Chairman of Royal Cup Coffee, chairs the board.

A+ has a staff of three full-time and two-part-time employees. It is heavily reliant on volunteers and consultants.

Program Highlight:

Task Force on Teaching and Student Achievement

The Task Force on Teaching and Student Achievement was established by A+ in 1997 to study and make recommendations about strategies to improve teaching and student achievement in Alabama. The Task Force is part of A+'s effort to build capacity within the education community and is comprised of 39 representatives from the education, business and public policy sectors. The Task Force met for two years and was informed by the work of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, the Southern Regional Education Board, the National Staff Development Council and by research conducted by experts in Alabama and across the country. In 1999 the Task Force released a 100-page report, *Teaching and Learning: Meeting the Challenge of High Standards*, which contained comprehensive recommendations for improving teaching quality in Alabama. The report has been distributed widely in Alabama, regionally, and across the country. Several Alabama colleges of education are using the report as a text. Additionally, a substantial number of school systems in Alabama are using the report for staff development.

The State Board of Education adopted the Task Force's recommendations and incorporated many of them into its fiscal year 2000 budget. Several state task forces, including the Governor's Commission on Teaching Quality (Title II), the Governor's Commission on Instructional Improvement and Academic Excellence, and the Statewide Commission on Social Promotion, are using the report to inform and shape their work

Other highlights are on pages 37, 39, and 45.

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Mission: To build the capacity of education in Alabama so that all children will learn at ever higher levels.

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Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Background & Creation: Founded in the late 1960s, the Florida Chamber Foundation is a non-profit affiliate of the Florida Chamber of Commerce. Through the early years of its existence, the Foundation focused exclusively on education. It operated a generous scholarship program to reward individual students and teachers for achieving excellence. In 1983, the Foundation broadened its scope beyond education to address other issues that affect the state's economic growth. At the same time, it re-evaluated its education program. It took on a broader view and began focusing on community-based efforts to reform Florida's public education system. Its current education initiatives continue to embrace this expanded view.

Educational Issues Addressed:
- Vouchers
- Standards
- Technology-based Curriculum
- Leadership Training

Programs:
The Foundation's education program, WorldClass Schools, grew out its 1994 report, *No More Excuses: What Business Must Do to Help Improve Florida's Schools*. The report identified the significant challenges that Florida's public schools faced, connected the need for education reform to the state's economic development, and laid out a plan for providing business leaders with the tools they need to be active participants in improving their local school systems. The response of the business community was overwhelming and the WorldClass Schools project was launched.

WorldClass Schools focuses on developing business interest, input and support to schools throughout the state. Its major components include:

WorldClass Academies
In conjunction with local chambers, the Foundation holds intensive one to three-day academies for business and civic leaders on key educational issues. Topics covered at the academies include: finance, academic standards, assessments, communications, and collective bargaining.

WorldClass Local Plans
After completing an academy and with assistance from the Foundation, local leaders — or "Champions" — develop long-term action plans for improving education in their own local school districts. Each plan responds to the particular needs and characteristics of that individual school district.

WorldClass Education Center
Housed within the Foundation, the Center provides ongoing technical support to "Champions" and keeps them connected to each other and informed of educational developments through a newsletter, website and annual conference.

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Funding:

Business — either through corporate contributions or corporate foundations — is the primary source of funding for the Foundation.

35 % **Corporate contributions for general and project support**
55 % **Project funding from corporate foundations**
1 % **Publications**
9 % **Personal contributions and/or membership revenue**

Chief Executive:

After joining the Foundation as Vice President of Development in 1995, Jane D. McNabb is now Executive Vice President of the Foundation and oversees all Foundation efforts. She has an extensive background in development. Prior to joining the Foundation, Ms. McNabb served as Associate Vice Chancellor and Director of Development at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Director of Leadership Gifts at the Florida State University Foundation; Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations at Virginia Tech; and Manager of Federal Grants, Research and Writing for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Organizational Structure:

The Foundation has a staff of six — four full-time and two part-time. It is moderately reliant on volunteers.

Program Highlight:

WorldClass Schools

WorldClass Schools, described briefly above, is a statewide program that is implemented locally. Since the program was established, it has had a meaningful effect on numerous school districts across Florida. Some of the local successes the WorldClass Schools initiative has brought about include:

- Collaborating with schools, higher educational institutions, local business and teacher unions, WorldClass Schools Champions in three districts have implemented professional development centers for teachers.
- In one county, Champions successfully worked with the school system to require algebra for high school graduates and established a business coalition that prepares issue papers and maintains a non-confrontational dialogue with the superintendent to explore key educational issues.
- Among their many accomplishments which also include the passage of a bond issue for improved technology in the schools, Champions in one district were able to transform the historically contentious collective bargaining process into a "collaborative" bargaining process, allowing both sides to negotiate in an environment of trust.

Other highlights are on page 43.

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Mission: **To contribute knowledge that strengthens Florida's economy through public policy research.**

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Georgia Partnership For Excellence In Education

Background & Creation: The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE), a statewide grassroots organization, was founded in 1990 by the Business Council of Georgia (now the Georgia Chamber of Commerce). GPEE was created, and remains, independent of the Council. At the time of its founding, business leaders across the state recognized that Georgia's continued economic development was dependent upon strengthening the state's public education system. GPEE provides a forum for these business leaders to come together with educational and political leaders to discuss, develop and advocate strategies to improve education for all students. GPEE also strives to build awareness of the issues surrounding the need for educational reform. Its various programs seek to communicate best practices in education in hope that they will be replicated or adapted to fit local needs.

Educational Issues Addressed:

- Accountability
- Funding
- Seamless Education
- Safe School Climate
- Leadership
- Teacher Quality

Programs:

GPEE's program offerings are numerous and varied. Given the grassroots nature of the organization, there is, however, a common theme that runs through much of its work — GPEE seeks out and provides opportunities for diverse groups of citizens to come together, to share experiences and knowledge, and to learn from one another and from experts. This strategy empowers citizens from different backgrounds and with different perspectives to affect change in education policy.

Bus Trip

Every year since 1993, GPEE has coordinated its Bus Trip Across Georgia. Participants, from a wide variety of professional backgrounds including legislators and business leaders, spend a week touring districts across the state, allowing them to see what is happening in schools and, especially, to identify promising programs that might work in their own locales.

Teacher Dialogue Forums

Teachers, the most critical link to student success, are often left out of policy discussions and the school reform planning process. To address this, GPEE developed Teacher Dialogue Forums with SERVE, the federally sponsored educational lab for the region. At the Forums, participants examine current research, share their views and experiences, and learn how to facilitate such discussions in their own school settings.

Principal Leadership Workshops

GPEE, in conjunction with several partners, developed an institute for principals in Atlanta, providing participants with professional development on issues of leadership and management.

Policymakers Institute

GPEE offers briefing sessions to members of the state legislature on a variety of education issues such as school funding, accountability measures, teacher quality and technology. GPEE provides an extensive notebook, *FactFinder*, on current and emerging educational issues to policymakers.

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Funding:

GPEE is one of two Columbia Group members that receives the majority of its funding through corporate and private foundation contributions.

31 % **Corporate contributions for general and project support**
13 % **Project funding from corporate foundations**
1 % **Publications**
23 % **Project funding from private foundations**
31 % **General operating from private foundations**
1 % **Personal contributions and/or membership revenue**

Chief Executive:

Since 1994, Tom Upchurch has led GPEE as its President. Mr. Upchurch has spent his career serving students in public education, first as a teacher, then as a principal at both elementary and high schools and finally, before coming to GPEE, as a district superintendent. As superintendent of Carrollton City Schools in Georgia, Mr. Upchurch restructured the school system to emphasize higher academic standards, establish community collaborations, incorporate technology and bring attention to the needs of at-risk students and their families. In 1999, Mr. Upchurch served as the Chair of the Accountability Committee of the Governor's Education Reform Study Commission.

Organizational Structure:

GPEE has six full-time employees. It does not currently have any part-time staff though it does rely on two interns. It is moderately reliant on volunteers.

Program Highlight:

Next Generation School Project

Begun in 1993, the Next Generation School Project (NGSP) is an innovative public-private partnership to create beacons of change in diverse systems around Georgia, programs that could serve as examples to and be replicated by other school systems. To receive grants, schools submit proposals explaining how they plan to improve the performance of their students by meeting nine rigorous criteria — including community collaboration, high standards, continuous staff development, attention to at-risk students,and incorporating technology — all which have proved to result in positive change. As part of the selection process, schools agree to an independent evaluation of their programs to show what kinds of results they have achieved. To date, over $10 million in public and private funds have been invested in NGSP schools, with the General Assembly contributing half the money.

The results thus far of the NGSP are encouraging. In schools large and small, rural and urban, change is underway. Schools are undertaking a comprehensive approach to meeting the challenges of improving academic achievement that is leading to real gains for students. In one metropolitan Atlanta high school, attendance is up as is the number of students earning academic honors. At the same time, both student failures and in-school suspensions are decreasing. Similar gains have been made in other NGSP schools across the state.

Other highlights are on pages 37 and 45.

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Mission: To be Georgia's foremost change agent and a significant leader in the journey to higher standards and increasing academic achievement for all students.

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Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in Kentucky

Background & Creation: Officially, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence was founded in 1983. Its origins, however, go back to 1980 when members of Kentucky's Council on Higher Education created the Committee on Higher Education in Kentucky's Future. The committee's mission was to identify what critical issues would be likely to affect higher education during the 1980s. Edward F. Prichard, a charismatic lawyer with a national reputation, was asked to chair the committee, a task he undertook with great enthusiasm, wit and flair. Over many months the committee worked to develop a blueprint for ensuring that Kentucky's institutions of higher education would be prepared for future challenges. Its report, *In Pursuit of Excellence*, gained considerable media attention and was held in high regard by educational experts across the nation. The state's then-governor and legislature were less moved by the report and took little action on its recommendations. In 1983, unwilling to see their work and the future of Kentucky's students pushed aside, members of the Committee reconstituted themselves as an independent, non-partisan advocacy group — the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in Kentucky. They also refocused most of their energies on elementary and secondary education.

Educational Issues Addressed:
- Maintaining Reform Momentum
- Citizen and Parent Involvement
- Teacher Quality

Programs:

In 1985, 66 property-poor districts sued the state of Kentucky, alleging that the system of school finance then in place was inequitable and inadequate. Four years later, the state Supreme Court not only found school funding to be inequitable and inadequate, it found the state's entire system of public education to be unconstitutional. It ordered the Kentucky General Assembly to create a system of public education that would provide each child an equal opportunity to have an adequate education. At the time of the court's decision, the Prichard Committee had been advocating for comprehensive reform for almost a decade and had developed a strong grassroots campaign in support of reform. Since the court's decision, the Prichard Committee has been a resource for policymakers in developing educationally sound policies and practices, and it has worked to maintain citizens' interest in and support for the arduous task of re-creating Kentucky's system of public education.

Kentucky School Updates

In collaboration with the Partnership for Kentucky Schools, the Prichard Committee publishes annually the Kentucky School Updates, a guide to help parents and others be better informed about public schools and reform initiatives. Topics covered include assessment, school accountability and parent involvement.

Parents and Teachers Talking Together

As part of a strategy to increase parental involvement in schools, the Prichard Committee sponsored structured discussions between parents and teachers through its Parents and Teachers Talking Together program. These discussions provided a safe environment for parents and teachers to talk about their aspirations for students and how they will help students fulfill these aspirations.

Community Committees for Education

Understanding that the success of Kentucky's reform initiative depends on implementation at the local level, the Prichard Committee organized a Community Committee for Education in every one of the state's school districts. These committees were charged with encouraging education reform implementation in each school district and with promoting participation in school-based decision making. Prichard Committee staff provided training and assistance to committee members to help them achieve their goals.

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Funding:

The Prichard Committee is the only Columbia Group member that receives a majority of its financial support from private foundations.

3 %	Corporate contributions for general and project support
1 %	Project funding from corporate foundations
76 %	Project funding from private foundations
16 %	General operating from private foundations
1 %	Personal contributions
3 %	Other

Chief Executive:

Since its founding in 1983, Robert Sexton has served as the Prichard Committee's Executive Director. Dr. Sexton has built his career in education. He has been a high school teacher, a professor of history, an administrator at the University of Kentucky and deputy director of the Kentucky Council on Higher Education. Dr. Sexton also founded the Kentucky Governor's Scholars Program and the Commonwealth Institute for Teachers. In addition, he has served as a member of several state and national boards and committees including the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education and the Kentucky Institute for Education Research.

Organizational Structure:

The Prichard Committee has the largest staff among Columbia Group members. It has 18 full-time employees and one part-time employee. It is moderately reliant on volunteers.

Program Highlight:

Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership

Given the profound effect parental involvement has on student success, the Prichard Committee has developed the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership. The Institute's curriculum is designed, through hands-on activities, group participation and homework assignment, to help parents gain an understanding of what's happening in Kentucky's schools as a result of the Kentucky Education Reform Act and assume leadership and advocacy roles in their own districts. Every year 200 parents participate in the Institute, which consists of three two-day sessions as well as an annual statewide conference.

Upon completing the Institute, parents commit to developing and implementing a project that involves other parents and will improve student achievement. Recent projects by Institute graduates include:

- forming a group to monitor academic improvement in local schools;
- creating a virtual reality classroom that lets students from a rural area conduct videoconferences with business leaders;
- collaborating with black church leaders to help train low-income families to become more effective education advocates.

Other highlights are on pages 41 and 45.

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Mission: **The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence is an independent statewide, non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to the improvement of education for all Kentuckians.**

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Council for A Better Louisiana

Background & Creation: The Council for A Better Louisiana (CABL) was founded in 1962 as a result of a comprehensive study of the economic development needs and quality of life in Louisiana and nine other southern states. The study, commissioned by two leading businessmen, made clear the significant challenges that Louisiana, despite its abundant natural resources, faced if it were to become economically competitive. Armed with these findings, the two leaders convened concerned citizens from across the state to form CABL. Since that time, CABL has been a forum for civic, business and education leaders to place sustained, non-partisan focus on the challenges the state faces and to take action to address those challenges.

Educational Issues Addressed:

- Accountability
- Teacher Quality
- School Funding/Tax Policies
- Voter Apathy
- Leadership Training

Programs:

CABL is one of four Columbia Group members whose program scope goes beyond education. CABL's programs focus on a variety of government policies to ensure that these policies address citizens' concerns and that the state behaves in an ethical manner, motivates civic participation, and promotes economic development.

CABL's education programs include:

The Forum for Education Excellence

With a goal of improving teacher quality, the Forum is a new initiative that will study and advocate for effective strategies to strengthen teacher training and professional development.

Supporting Local Education Funds

CABL, in collaboration with the Louisiana Department of Education and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, is providing advice and resources to local communities in establishing permanently endowed local education funds (LEFs). LEFs enable the private sector to leverage contributions to local school systems and to invest in them in a systemic way. With CABL's support, LEFs have become major forces in education improvement in several Louisiana localities.

Principal Internship Program

CABL, working with several partners including Hibernia Bank, Community Coffee, Inc. and Southeastern Louisiana University, sponsors a two-year professional development program for first and second-year principals across Louisiana.

Training for New School Board Members

In a three-year project, CABL hosted workshops, conducted intensive retreats and seminars, and sponsored long-term strategic planning sessions and issues forums for new school board members. More than half of Louisiana's 66 local boards participated in some aspect of this effort.

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Funding: CABL's funding sources are more varied than many other Columbia Group members.

14 %	Corporate contributions for general and project support
16 %	Project funding from corporate foundations
7 %	Training and consulting
20 %	Project funding from private foundations
4 %	General operating from private foundations
35 %	Personal contributions and/or membership revenue
4 %	Other

Chief Executive: For the last ten years, Harold Suire has led CABL as its president and CEO. In addition to working in the private sector, Mr. Suire taught in public schools and at the university level and was a high school principal before joining CABL. Under his direction, CABL has not only undertaken several successful educational initiatives, it has received national recognition for its civic engagement project, The People's Agenda, aimed at voter education. Mr. Suire serves on numerous regional boards and advisory committees.

Organizational Structure: CABL has five full-time and two part-time employees as well as an intern. It is moderately reliant on volunteers.

Program Highlight:

The People's Agenda

CABL plays a major role in Louisiana's multi-year accountability effort. This role grew out of CABL's The People's Agenda project. Established in 1994, The People's Agenda is an on-going voter education and legislative watchdog initiative. The project began with scientific polling and focus groups among voters across the state to determine what issues they most cared about. The results made clear that education was among the top priorities for voters. CABL presented its findings and a series of related questions to candidates in the 1995 elections, including a question asking how they would address the public's call for improved public education. Their responses were released by CABL in voter guides sent out across the state.

The People's Agenda did not stop there, however. Having identified the issues of greatest concern for voters, it next asked voters how they believed these issues should be addressed and kept legislators aware of these concerns. Recognizing that increasing accountability was key to improving public schools, CABL held public forums across the state on accountability and its components — high academic standards, meaningful performance measures, and performance goals based on those measures. These forums provided an opportunity for teachers, parents and other concerned citizens to come together to discuss and critique the standards.

The legislature and governor in turn established three commissions — Accountability, School Finance, and Teacher Preparation. In recognition of CABL's efforts and expertise, the legislation required that representatives of CABL sit on each of the commissions. CABL's president serves on the Accountability Commission and the Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Preparation. The state's accountability plan, developed by the Accountability Commission, has been recognized by Education Week as one of the nation's most comprehensive.

Other highlights are on pages 41 and 47.

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Mission: A visionary, non partisan statewide organization which acts as a catalyst for improving the quality of life for all citizens in Louisiana

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Public Education Forum of Mississippi

Background & Creation: The Public Education Forum of Mississippi was founded in 1989 by a group of visionary business, education and political leaders in the state in an effort to improve public education. A non-profit, non-partisan research group, the Forum is committed to being the leading independent force for education in Mississippi. In creating the Forum, the organization's founders drew on the experience of the Public School Forum of North Carolina. Establishment of the Mississippi Forum provided a powerful means to address, in a more forceful and systematic way, issues of educational improvement and economic growth in the state.

Mission:
To ensure all Mississippians receive a superior education that empowers them to be productive and self-sustaining citizens by:

- the dynamic partnership of business, education and government officials
- innovation in teaching and learning based upon the best research
- creating and sustaining growth in public support for public education
- intervention and advocacy to meet specific needs
- acquisition of resources necessary for transformational change.

Educational Issues Addressed:

- Teacher/Administrator Supply and Demand
- Statewide Early Childhood initiatives
- School-to-Career Programs
- Workplace Skills

Programs:
The Forum's education initiatives are currently focused on "pipeline" issues — teacher supply and demand, early childhood education — and, increasingly, on issues linked to economic development. Mississippi's employers are concerned about getting workers with the increasingly complex, technological skills needed for today's work place, an issue that has direct consequences for the long-term economic viability of the state.

Research
To address concerns regarding the growing shortage of teachers and the quality of teaching, the Forum has undertaken several research projects including one that examines "pipeline" issues and the Mississippi Teacher Assessment Instrument.

Consensus Building
The Forum supports the development of a shared vision for education and collective action to implement that vision. It seeks to build consensus in part through its Education Alliance and its annual Fall Legislative Forum.

Lobbying
The Forum has been a leading voice within the legislature, working to support a number of key educational issues including the Workforce and Education Act of 1994, the creation of the Mississippi Teacher Center, the Center for Educational Analysis and, most recently, the Mississippi Adequate Education Act.

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Funding:

The Forum receives far more of its funding through corporate contributions than any other Columbia Group organization.

83 % Corporate contributions for general and project support
12 % Project funding from corporate foundations
2 % State government
2 % Training and consulting
2 % Personal contributions and/or membership revenue

Chief Executive:

Dr. William Lewis came to the Forum in 1998 after spending 30 years serving students as a teacher, coach and administrator. He has worked with students at virtually every level of education in K-12 and community colleges as well as universities. Immediately prior to joining the Forum, he served as superintendent of the Petal School District, a district that consistently ranked as one of Mississippi's top districts on measurements of student achievement.

Organizational Structure:

The Forum has three full-time employees and one part-time employee. It is heavily reliant on volunteers.

Program Highlight:

Educator Supply and Demand

Many states are struggling to find qualified teachers and administrators, particularly in such fields as science, math, foreign languages and special education. Mississippi is one of these states. In response to this problem, the Forum conducted research and sponsored several influential studies on teacher shortages.

The research found that the number of teachers teaching on emergency licenses was steadily increasing. During the 1992-93 school year, 586 teachers in Mississippi had emergency licenses; five years later, by the 1997-98 school year, that number had more than doubled to 1,210.

The task force also found that, with each passing year, greater percentages of teachers are eligible for retirement. There were not enough students enrolling in the state's teacher education programs to replace retiring teachers and, equally critical, 40 percent of the students who did earn degrees in education either chose not to teach or left the state.

These studies, contributed directly to the passage of legislation in 1998 which created scholarship, housing and relocation incentives for teachers willing to serve in areas of the state identified as "critical shortage areas." Teachers and aspiring teachers are responding to these incentives. In the 1999-2000 school year, for example, more than twice as many students applied for these scholarships than could be accepted.

Other highlights are on page 37.

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Mission: **To ensure all Mississippians receive a superior education that empowers them to be productive and self-sustaining citizens.**

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Public School Forum of North Carolina

Background & Creation: The Public School Forum of North Carolina was established in 1985. While the business community was actively involved in its development, the original notion of a non-partisan association dedicated to promoting the best interest of students came from the state legislature. In the early 1980s, several legislators, frustrated by the education gridlock which had developed, came upon the idea of creating a conference or committee of influential leaders to build consensus around educational issues. These legislators invited several business leaders to join them in planning the organization and from that, with support from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, the Public School Forum of North Carolina was founded. The Forum is the only Columbia Group member that was started by legislative initiative.

Educational Issues Addressed:

- School Funding
- Closing the Black/White Performance Gap
- Ending Social Promotion
- School Choice
- Meaningful Employability Skills
- Teacher Training and Support

Programs:

Since its inception, the Forum has been involved in a diverse array of successful programs and has worked collaboratively with a variety of partners both public and private to improve teaching and learning in North Carolina. Current initiatives include:

Institute for Educational Policymakers

Through symposiums, briefings and quarterly newsletters, the Institute provides educational policymakers, the State Board of Education members, and the media that cover their events with the facts and information they need to make good decisions. It is the first such policymakers' forum in the nation devoted solely to education.

Regional Initiatives

On behalf of SERVE, the federal education laboratory for the Southeast, the Forum coordinates a regional school business partnership network intended to build the capacity of local partnership efforts. Part of that network is NC Partners, a statewide umbrella organization housed and staffed by the Forum that connects local chambers of commerce, non-profit organizations, businesses and schools so that they may work cooperatively on educational issues in their communities. As part of its regional work, the Forum is managing a pilot project in four school systems, two in North Carolina and two in Mississippi, that are demonstrating how rural counties can "grow their own" information technology support staff.

Research

Sound research supports all of the Forum's policy and program initiatives and has been an integral component in promoting continuing education reform in the state. For example, two Forum briefing papers focused legislative and media attention on the needs of low-performing schools and resulted in the State Board of Education adopting NC Helps, a multi-faceted program that provides support to these schools.

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Funding:

Unique among Columbia Group members and reflecting in part its origin in legislative action, the Forum gets most of its funding through the public sector.

6 % Corporate contributions for general and project support
11 % Project funding from corporate foundations
40 % State government
29 % Federal contract/research funding
1 % Publications
3 % Training/consulting
7 % General operating from private foundations
2 % Personal contributions and/or membership revenue
1 % Other

Chief Executive:

Since 1986, the Forum has been guided by John N. Dornan, who serves as President and Executive Director. Mr. Dornan began his career as a high school English teacher. He left the classroom in 1969 and, for seventeen years, worked with educational associations in Pennsylvania, California, Indiana, Washington DC, New York and North Carolina. He is a member of North Carolina's School Improvement Panel and Workforce Preparedness Commission, and has served as a consultant to foundations, state educational agencies and school/business partnerships.

It was Mr. Dornan's vision that led to the convening of the Columbia Group. He continues to provide inspiration and leadership to the group and his suggestions are now helping to shape some collaborative activities within the network.

Organizational Structure:

The Forum has 12 full-time and three part-time employees. It also accepts interns and currently has one. It rarely uses volunteers.

Program Highlight:

North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program

In 1985 the Forum released *Who Will Teach Our Children?*, a ten-point teacher recruitment proposal, which had been developed by a partnership of business, educational and political leaders across the state. It resulted in the creation of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program the following year. The mission of the program is to recruit talented high school graduates into the teaching profession and to help them develop leadership qualities such as visionary thinking and risk-taking. The program provides $6,500 scholarships for four years as well as innovative academic and field experiences, substantially enriching Fellows' preparation.

The program has been successful in recruiting highly prepared and motivated students, as evidenced by their high average SAT scores and grade point averages, and in encouraging more men and more minorities to pursue careers in education. Approximately 20 percent of Fellows are minorities and 30 percent are male. Other states such as South Carolina are establishing similar initiatives, based on the Forum's success.

In 1995, the Forum undertook an evaluation of the Teaching Fellows program. It found that, while Fellows were performing well and were more likely to be recognized as skilled teachers than non-Fellows, many were leaving the profession at the end of their four-year commitment. These findings were released in a report entitled *Keeping Talented Teachers*.

The Forum then created a task force to look more closely at the reasons so many Fellows were leaving the profession. The task force proposed a series of solutions including paid mentoring and release time for new teachers. These proposals were published in *A Profession in Jeopardy*. Many of the recommendations were passed into law as part of Governor Hunt's Excellent Schools Act in 1997.

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Other highlights are on pages 43 and 47.

Mission: To work toward a North Carolina system of schooling that is second to none in the world.

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South Carolina Chamber Excellence in Education Council

Background & Creation: The predecessor to the South Carolina Chamber Excellence in Education Council was the South Carolina Business Center for Excellence in Education, founded in 1990. The Center was affiliated with the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce but was not part of it. In 1998 boards of the Center and the Chamber restructured the Center to be the Excellence in Education Council within the Chamber. This restructuring allowed the Council to better use the Chamber's resources such as lobbying, increasing its ability to shape state educational policy. The Council now consists of 24 CEOs, each of whom is committed to improving education in the state.

Mission:
The South Carolina Chamber Excellence in Education Council serves as the Chamber's vehicle for influencing results-driven improvement of education through proactive advocacy of statewide education policy, independent research, education initiatives, monitoring, clearinghouse capabilities, and a voice for business on education issues.

Educational Issues Addressed:
- Teacher Quality
- Accountability
- Higher Education
- School Readiness
- Workforce Preparation
- Charter Schools

Programs:
The Council is expanding its scope of work. In addition to operating as a think tank, it has become an advocacy organization that deals with policy development. Currently its programs fall into four general areas:

Independent research
Independent research is at the core of the Council's programs. The Council has undertaken research projects in many critical areas including, most recently, teacher quality, school finance, school-to-work, accountability measures, and program duplication in higher education.

Identifying best practices
The Council supports pilot or demonstration projects that provide information or can be replicated across the state. Currently the Council is working to expand a successful model for business partnerships with low-performing schools, which encourages better student performance.

Recognizing success
Disseminating information on what works in schools is an essential ingredient in building consensus and taking action around questions of school reform.

Lobbying
The Council uses what it has learned through its research and pilot programs to support and advocate for educationally sound policies in the legislature. Successful efforts include passage of the Education Accountability Act of 1998.

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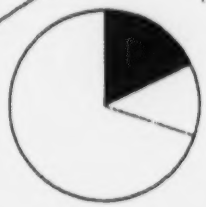
Funding:

The Council is funded through the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce and, most recently, has received a federal grant.



70% **Federal Contract/Research Funding**
18 % **Personal contributions and/or membership revenue**
12 % **Other — Chamber of Commerce non-dues revenues**

Chief Executive:

The chief executive is Dr. Carol Stewart, who has served as the Vice President for Education at the Chamber since January 1999. Her responsibilities were expanded in January 2000 to include all lobbying and governmental relations, as Vice President for Public Policy. Dr. Stewart has spent her career in education and has worked as a teacher, principal and district superintendent. She has considerable legislative and policymaking experience, having served as the Director of Research for the South Carolina House of Representatives and, just prior to joining the Chamber, the governor's Executive Assistant for Education Policy. She has also served as the Deputy Director of Education at the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Organizational Structure:

The Council is staffed by five part-time employees. Volunteers play an active and vital role in the work of the Council. The Office of Public Policy has ten full-time employees.

Program Highlight:

School-to-Work Initiative

The Council has taken a leading role in South Carolina's School-to-Work initiative. As part of this initiative, the Council:

- identified and prioritized 37 workplace skills and competencies that are incorporated into the state's curriculum frameworks;
- administers a biannual survey to business leaders to gauge how well South Carolina's schools — from K-12 through four-year universities — are meeting employers' needs;
- developed a state plan for increasing employers' participation in school-to-work initiatives;
- produces resource publications on school-to-work issues for students, parents, educators and employers.

High Performance Partnerships

Through a federal Gear-Up grant, the Council created a vehicle to target business resources to low-performing schools to help increase academic achievement. The initiative:

- recruits and trains business partners;
- matches business partners with low-performing schools;
- monitors partnerships and evaluates best practices;
- networks the partnerships and provides advocacy for them.

Other highlights are on page 39.

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Mission: Results-driven improvement of education through non-partisan policy research, [illegible] in education issues.

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Tennessee Tomorrow

Background & Creation: A statewide study of community leaders in 1993 made clear the need for a partnership of the public, private and academic sectors focused on long-term economic development initiatives that would bridge administrations. As a result, Tennessee Tomorrow was organized in early 1994 with a vision of creating a bipartisan organization of public, private and academic leaders to work to overcome historical differences in order to achieve long-term, economic development goals.

Educational Issues Addressed:

- Statewide Education Improvement
- Professional Development for Teachers
- Technology
- School-to-Work
- Workforce Development

Programs:

Tennessee Tomorrow has programs in three areas: education and workforce development; technology and community partnerships; and finance. Not long after Tennessee Tomorrow was founded, the organization commissioned a competitive assessment that identified the quality of Tennessee's public school system and the educational quality of its workforce as the two greatest barriers to the state's long-term economic growth. As a result, the majority of Tennessee Tomorrow's time and funding — 70 percent — is spent on its education and workforce development initiatives.

School to Work Initiative

Tennessee Tomorrow coordinated the writing of the state's School-to-Work grant, funded at $28.2 million. Since it received funding, the initiative has seen many of its recommendations embraced and implemented. The Board of Education now requires that students pass end-of-course examinations in Algebra I, Biology I and English II in order to graduate from high school. There are numerous examples across the state of best practices by School-to-Work community partnerships.

Statewide Education Improvement

Tennessee Tomorrow has recently made a firm commitment to launching a statewide education improvement initiative. New organizational efforts support a pre-kindergarten program to ensure that children enter the classroom ready to learn and a decision to pursue a partnership with the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

Annual Competitive Assessment

Every year, Tennessee Tomorrow conducts an assessment of Tennessee's performance relative to 16 other states and against specific education and economic development goals. The assessment is a means to educate the public and leaders from all sectors on reasons for and means to improve the quality of life for all Tennesseans.

Technology Center Partnership

Tennessee Tomorrow developed a statewide plan to link technology centers with public schools and other training organizations. The plan contemplated extensive use of technology to help close the skills gap, lower the drop-out rate, eliminate postsecondary remedial studies and significantly reduce adult illiteracy. Although the program has yet to be adopted statewide, individual schools are using it to improve student achievement.

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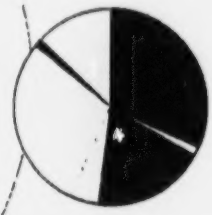
Funding:

Tennessee Tomorrow is unique among Columbia Group members in that a sizable portion — almost one-third — of its budget comes from training and consulting on Tennessee SkillsNet, a computer-based educational program which Tennessee Tomorrow makes available to schools and businesses for student/employee training.

32 %	corporate contributions for general and project support
1 %	project funding from corporate foundations
19 %	state government
5 %	federal contract/research funding
29 %	training/consulting
1 %	personal contributions and/or membership revenue
13 %	other



Chief Executive:

Tennessee Tomorrow has been led since its inception in 1994 by George Yowell. Prior to joining Tennessee Tomorrow, Mr. Yowell was a banker for 30 years. For 19 of those years, he was President and CEO of Dominion Banks in Richmond and Nashville. He has also served as chairman of both the Nashville Area and Richmond Area Chambers of Commerce.

Organizational Structure:

Tennessee Tomorrow has a staff of three full-time and three part-time employees. It is moderately reliant on volunteers.

Program Highlight:

Tennessee SkillsNet

One of Tennessee Tomorrow's most successful initiatives has been Tennessee SkillsNet. Tennessee SkillsNet is a computer-based educational program designed to enhance the skills of students and employees. Tennessee SkillsNet is the result of a partnership between Tennessee Tomorrow and TRO Learning, a company that designs and delivers workforce and young-adult remedial training via the Internet, the Intranet and LAN-based systems. Through the partnership, Tennessee Tomorrow has been able to deliver SkillsNet at a cost-effective price to local schools, government agencies and private companies. Schools have used it to bring struggling students up to grade level, and businesses have used it to provide specific workforce development training and as a means for employees to earn a GED or an associate degree.

Other highlights are on page 45.

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Mission: To provide a vision and serve as a catalyst for improving the quality of life for all citizens of Tennessee.

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The charts and tables that follow provide a composite look at issues addressed by the organizations that make up the Columbia Group, the most common techniques they employ to address these issues, various organizational concerns, the main constituencies they serve, and their sources of support.

Major Education Issues for Columbia Group Organizations

Columbia Group organizations identify and suggest practical solutions to significant issues in education. These issues are at the core of systematic approaches to education reform.

Issues	No.
Accountability	6
Teacher Quality	8
School Finance	4
Economic Development and Work Force Concerns	7
Standards	6
Leadership Development	6
Early Childhood Initiatives	3
School Choice	5
Higher Education/K-12 Co-Reform	7

How Columbia Group Organizations Deal With Important Issues

Columbia Group organizations employ similar techniques to inform the public about crucial educational issues in order to build needed public will to deal with these issues in effective and comprehensive ways.

Approaches	No.
Research, Information Gathering and Fact Finding	9
Building Consensus about Approaches to Issues	9
Providing Strategies to Promote Significant Change	9
Educating the Public on Important Issues	9
Disseminating Information	9
Lobbying	6
Public Sector Commission or Task Force Involvement	7
Leadership Development	6
Voter Information Projects	1

Organizational Concerns Identified by Columbia Group Organizations

Columbia Group organizations have the same concerns that are endemic to other small non-profit organizations.

Concerns	No.
Funding	9
Communications	3
Relationship with Board or Chamber	2
Maintaining the Momentum for Reform	6
Building Greater Capacity	3
Staffing	2

Constituencies Identified by Columbia Group Organizations

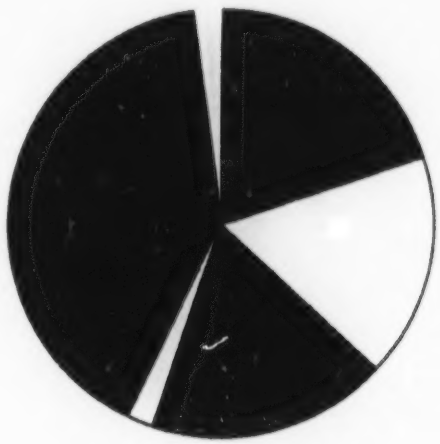
In promoting education reform, Columbia Group organizations reach out to a diverse array of organizations and individuals. They focus on educators and are heavily reliant on the support of business people.

Constituencies	No.
Policymakers	9
Educators (including Education Officials)	9
Business	9
General Public	7
Media	5
Civic Leaders	7
Parents	2

Sources of Support for Columbia Group Organizations

Two-thirds of Columbia Group organizations' total funding comes from three sources: corporate contributions, project funding from private foundations, and project funding from corporate foundations.

Support	%
Corporate Contributions	20%
Project Funding from Corporate Foundations	17%
State Government	8%
Federal Contract/Research Funding	9%
Publications	1%
Training/Consulting	2%
Project Funding from Private Foundations	24%
General Operating from Private Foundations	11%
Personal Contributions and/ or Membership Revenue	6%
Other	2%



Columbia group organizations are, with certain exceptions, relatively recent creations. CABL in Louisiana was created to promote general statewide improvement in 1962, and the Florida Chamber traces its history to 1968. The Prichard Committee in Kentucky was founded in 1983 and the Public School Forum of North Carolina in 1985. None of the other five organizations is more than a decade old.

These organizations, in a relatively short period of time, have become mainstays of education reform. They are recognized for the leadership they provide on critical issues in their states, and have increasingly become models for interested citizens who wish to form similar organizations in other states, often outside of the South.

In promoting education reform and in building their reputations for effectiveness, Columbia Group organizations have operated both in the public arena and behind the scenes. They have been at the forefront of efforts to promote change, and have become recognized for their willingness to take risks to promote reform. They have also demonstrated a willingness to share credit with other organizations, elected officials and educators, and in many instances, to forgo public recognition for their achievements. The ability to alternate between working under the glare of public scrutiny and promoting change from behind the scenes has enabled Columbia Group organizations to be a constant force for reform.

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During the course of their respective histories, Columbia Group organizations have independently developed a number of characteristics that have become central factors in their success. Each of these organizations displays, in varying degrees, all of these characteristics that have enabled them to move the reform agenda. Columbia Group organizations are:

Credible Despite their support from business, Columbia Group organizations maintain an aura of independence and credibility. Each organization focuses on facts. They use research, information gathering and investigations that are both comprehensive and fair. The advocacy positions they have taken have been buttressed by facts at all times. This has earned the organizations respect throughout each of the states.

Use of research, along with an emphasis on even-handedness, have garnered for each of these organizations a reputation as non-partisan. Their goal is improved education and increased benefits for those who depend on it. Non-partisanship does not, however, mean non-political. Columbia Group organizations have been able to function effectively in highly charged political environments. They have also demonstrated a facility to deal successfully with very different political and educational leaders to promote education reform.

Learning Organizations Columbia Group organizations have demonstrated a respect for the evolving political environments in their states and an ability to draw on their experiences to grow and change. Their number one priority — improving public education for all citizens in the state — remains constant, but group members have displayed pragmatism in constantly developing and refining techniques to advance this goal. Flexibility and the ability to learn from experience have characterized their success.

Committed for the Long-Term Each of the Columbia Group organizations has demonstrated an understanding that education reform is a dynamic process, not a static event. Work to improve education involves complex, time-consuming efforts. While each of these organizations must devise short-term solutions for pressing questions, its horizon is significantly wider than the immediate; each organization explicitly takes a long-term approach to its work.

Entrepreneurial For organizations dealing with cutting edge education issues, financial resources by themselves are not enough. Columbia Group organizations trade also in intellectual capital. They consequently broker both resources and ideas, and use private sector investments to develop and implement innovative and replicable programs that bring solid results.

Strengthening the Civic Culture Columbia Group organizations represent the business commitment to improving education for all citizens. In the South, for the last two decades, the impetus for reform has been closely connected to the widely perceived need to develop a new economy. Columbia Group organizations are committed to this agenda and work every day to realize it. At the same time, however, their work is motivated by another powerful realization — our democratic institutions depend on an educated populace for their success. Columbia Group organizations encourage and support discussion, dialogue and debate among diverse members of the community. This work gives citizens an important mechanism to express their own deeply held views about education improvement.

Helping to Set the State's Education Agenda Many non-profit organizations, concerned about public decision-making and its effects on a state, find themselves reacting and responding to initiatives rather than helping to inform them. Columbia Group organizations, building on their credibility and experience, are not so constrained. These organizations, drawing on current research, new information and best practices, have suggested and developed programs that have become widely adopted throughout their states, and have directly influenced the formulation of state policy and practice. At the same time, Columbia Group organizations vigorously monitor state activities in education, make suggestions, offer criticisms, and promote, where appropriate, reasonable alternatives to established practice.

The remainder of this chapter illustrates how various members of the Columbia Group exemplify each of the characteristics that are central to the organizations' success. The examples that follow were culled from many possibilities. Many other examples, from each of the organizations in the network, are of equal power.

Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education:
Since its inception, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education has striven to be a source of reliable, up-to-date information for policymakers, educators, the business community, parents and even students. GPEE has taken on various strategies to reach this goal including publications such as its quarterly newsletter, research-based reports on pertinent issues (most recently school safety and discipline) and its Fact Finder. It has gathered and disseminated information through a variety of forums including: its Policymakers Institute; Teacher Dialogue Forums; a Dean's Conference which brought together deans of schools of education to examine math, science and reading education; and the Arts Education GSAMS videoconference which allowed educators from across K-16 to discuss issues in arts education.

The esteem with which GPEE is held by educators and policymakers was made clear when its president was appointed to the Governor's Education Reform Study Commission and as chair of its Accountability Task Force. Twenty-one of GPEE's board members also were appointed. The Commission has developed a statewide, comprehensive plan for education reform that will improve student achievement and is being considered by the Georgia legislature for adoption in 2000. Increasing accountability has been the cornerstone of this plan. Prior to the formation of the Commission, GPEE incorporated accountability as a key feature of its 1998 Policymakers Institute for members of the state's House and Senate Education Committees, raising legislators' awareness of it as critical to successful reform.

Mississippi Public Education Forum:
In response to the report *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, which held that the most important factor in student achievement was teacher quality, the Forum convened a task force comprised of educational, business and legislative partners to look at teachers and teaching in Mississippi. The first part of this effort profiled the current and prospective teacher workforce and evaluated supply and demand issues. The task force's findings, based on extensive data collection and analysis, made clear that not only does Mississippi face a teacher shortage in the future, it already has one.

The task force released its findings in a report entitled *Educator Pipeline*. In light of the gravity of the problem, the Forum proposed legislative, policy and private-sector recommendations to address the issue. Following the report's release, Forum members met with and testified before the Education Committees of the House and Senate. As a result of the Forum's research and communications, the legislature increased teacher salaries 10 percent. The following year, legislators passed the Mississippi Critical Teacher Shortage Act which, among other things, provided students and teachers willing to work in shortage areas with scholarships, relocation grants and a home loan program.

A subsequent report, *Quality Teachers, Every Child's Birthright* was produced in November 1998 and outlined the significant factors affecting the retention and attrition of the state's teacher workforce. This report has influenced the development of additional public policy and programming regarding compensation, induction, student accountability, and school safety.

A+ Education Foundation of Alabama: A+ has an Education Research Task Force, which is currently chaired by Dr. Sharon Ramey, Director of the Civitan International Research Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. In 1998 the Task Force commissioned papers in three areas: equity and adequacy; standards, assessments and accountability; and early childhood/school readiness. These papers stimulated discussion and action bolstered by data on the key findings among stakeholders in education, and they supported A+'s work in other areas.

A+ works closely in many areas with senior staff at the state's Department of Education and with the Alabama Board of Education. The paper on equity and adequacy was prepared for the state superintendent, to help him formulate policy. To garner maximum attention and spur public debate, A+ released the paper on standards, assessments and accountability to the media at the same time as students' scores on standardized exams were released. The final paper on early childhood and school readiness was released collaboratively with the organization, Voices for Alabama's Children, to over 600 influential people and organizations in the state.

Additionally, A+'s Task Force on Teaching and Student Achievement in July 1999 released the report *Teaching and Learning: Meeting the Challenge of High Standards in Alabama*. The report's research and recommendations are serving as the cornerstone of the work of several state commissions.

Columbia Group organizations use research, information gathering and investigations that are both comprehensive and fair. The advocacy positions they take are buttressed by facts at all times.

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A+ Education Foundation of Alabama:

In the early 1990s, A+ undertook an ambitious initiative. It developed, in collaboration with key business, education and political stakeholders, a plan to improve education in Alabama — A Blueprint for Successful Alabama Schools. Premised on research-based practices and driven by a sense of urgency, the Blueprint provided the framework for comprehensive reform in the state.

A+ then immersed itself in a campaign to cultivate public and political support for reform. Co-sponsored by the Alabama Education Association, the Alabama PTA, the Alabama Association of School Boards and local chambers of commerce, A+ held regional meetings for civic, educational, business and political leaders. Town meetings across the state soon followed, and both of these activities generated enthusiasm for the reform. The likelihood of legislative support for the Blueprint seemed high.

High hopes were soon dashed, however, by politics — gubernatorial politics, union politics and special interest politics. Throughout the state, those suspicious of or threatened by change spoke out vigorously — sometimes misleadingly — against reform. The goals and strategies of the Blueprint were distorted. Passage of the Blueprint failed.

Instead of abandoning themselves to defeat and giving up on reform, A+ members decided to examine what had happened and to learn from it. After careful deliberation and much discussion, A+ came to several conclusions that have informed its work ever since. Its most important lessons were:

- A+ got too far out in front. To succeed, A+ must make the case for school improvement in a way that is clear to the people of Alabama, that speaks to their interests and that generates broad-based support.
- Americans are riding a wave of public distrust and anger at government at all levels. To overcome these feelings, A+ must speak frankly and honestly about what's best for the children in our schools.
- Schools won't get better by simply passing laws. There has to be greater capacity to carry out reform measures. Attitudes have to change, too. It's a difficult but not impossible task, requiring patience and coordinated effort.

Its frank and sometimes painful appraisal of what happened enabled A+ to grow as an organization and to adapt itself to better meet the needs of Alabama's students. A+ has identified five areas on which it now focuses its efforts: capacity building, work with policymakers, research, networking, and communications.

South Carolina Chamber Excellence in Education Council:

Successful organizations — whether non-profit or for-profit — are both flexible and dynamic. They respond to changes in the environment around them and to the new challenges those changes bring. The South Carolina Chamber offers a powerful example of how an organization can transform itself to meet evolving needs. The predecessor of the Chamber's Excellence in Education Council was the South Carolina Business Center for Excellence in Education. It was established in 1990 and, while affiliated with the Chamber, it was an independent organization. The Center functioned primarily as a think tank — undertaking research in a number of areas such as accountability, charter schools, and school-to-work initiatives. It also conducted surveys of business leaders to identify issues in education most important to them, including specific skills and competencies needed for success in the workplace. These surveys informed the Center's work with the South Carolina Department of Education to incorporate 37 skills into the state's new curriculum frameworks.

In 1998, the boards of the Center and the Chamber reconstituted the Center to make it part of the Chamber. This change was made to facilitate the Center's move from a "think tank" to an advocacy organization, an organization that could play a more active role in shaping educational policy in South Carolina.

Columbia Group organizations demonstrate a respect for the evolving political environments in their states. Flexibility and the ability to learn from experience characterize their success.

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence:

Many observers have traced the beginning of Kentucky's current reform effort to 1989 when the Kentucky Supreme Court held that the entire operation of the state's public school system was unconstitutional. With its sweeping decision, the court required the General Assembly to re-create a state system of public education.

While the current reform effort could not have happened without the court's decision, the foundation for reform was, in fact, laid a decade earlier when the state's Council on Higher Education created the Committee on Higher Education in Kentucky's Future. This group was the genesis of the Prichard Committee. When the Committee's recommendations went nowhere with the governor or the legislature, the Committee reconstituted itself as an independent, non-partisan organization that could advocate for educationally sound policies and programs.

At the same time, committee members realized that improving education could not happen by focusing on one sector — higher education or elementary and secondary education — alone. Improving education, they believed, required a comprehensive, collaborative plan based on a seamless vision of public education. Reaching this vision of a connected system, they understood, would not happen overnight or even over two or three years. It would require a sustained effort over a considerable period of time to move every school, every student in the state into a reconstituted educational system that both expected and supported high achievement from students, teachers and administrators.

The Prichard Committee soon undertook a sustained effort to engage the public in a dialogue about and build its support for reform. It held workshops to provide citizens with the skills they needed to advocate for reform in their own communities and developed relationships with those in the business community. While it focused on public engagement, the organization continued to do extensive research on policies and programs that improved student achievement.

As a result of its early work, the Prichard Committee had both the resources and the credibility to be active participants in the legislative process that resulted in the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). But Prichard Committee members understood that passage of KERA did not mean their job was over; in some ways it was just beginning. The Committee then shifted its focus from advocating reform to sustaining and supporting it.

Council for A Better Louisiana:

Founded in 1962, the Council for A Better Louisiana (CABL) is the oldest Columbia Group organization. Its founders, two leading businessmen, saw that the state's resources — its people and its abundance of oil, minerals, rich farmlands and much more — were being squandered. They understood that reversing this trend, which had been propelled in large part through short sighted economic, social and political policies, required collective and sustained action. Louisiana's problems had not developed overnight, nor would they be solved in a day.

For almost four decades, CABL has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life for all of Louisiana's citizens. It has done so through programs that build civic participation and public consensus on important issues, that encourage the diversification of the state's economy, that enhance the knowledge and skills of leaders across the state, and that support the development of a system of public education which prepares every student for the demands of postsecondary education and the workplace.

CABL's educational initiatives — the Forum for Education Excellence, the Local Education Funds, and the Louisiana Principal Internship Program — reflect the long-term, comprehensive approach the organization has taken to the issues it addresses. Each is built on or incorporates research to support the development of educationally sound policies and programs, and each recognizes that creating good schools is a community effort.

Each Columbia Group organization demonstrates an understanding that education reform is a dynamic process, not a static event. Each explicitly takes a long-term approach to its work.

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Public School Forum of North Carolina:
As states grapple with the tenacious problem of improving student achievement, many of them are experimenting with charter schools as a possible means for infusing new ideas. Simply defined, charter schools are public schools that are free from many of the regulations that govern traditional public schools but that are held to the same outcome standards. This freedom from regulation can allow them to develop innovative methods of improving student achievement.

Charter schools — both those converted from traditional public schools and those that are new start-ups — face many challenges, not the least of which is often suspicion, if not hostility, from traditional public schools. Recognizing this challenge for charter schools and wanting to test their potential, the Public School Forum of North Carolina, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, coordinated Project Connect.

Over a period of three years and across five states — Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina and South Carolina — Project Connect helped build links between traditional public schools and charter schools. At the same time, Project Connect examined charter schools for policies and practices that led to improved achievement and could be replicated in traditional public schools. For the study, the Forum partnered with three other Columbia Group members: the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, the Council for A Better Louisiana, and the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce's Education Council.

The connections between charter schools and traditional public schools were made through conferences and a web site that linked schools to one another and pointed them to various resources within the region and across the nation. Project Connect participants conducted site visits to successful schools and distributed a newsletter. The Forum, in conjunction with the League of Women Voters of North Carolina, surveyed superintendents across that state to determine how they perceived charter schools to be affecting public education generally.

At the conclusion of Project Connect in fall 1999, the Forum and its partner organizations evaluated their work and gleaned from it lessons that could inform policy decisions governing charter schools in these five states. Its findings are detailed in a newly released report, *Public Policy and Charter Schools.*

Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation:
Frustrated with business' long-time role as a passive funder of local schools, while students seemed less and less prepared for higher education or for the workforce, the Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation developed its WorldClass Schools program.

In implementing WorldClass Schools, the Foundation drew on extensive research into what works and what doesn't work in reforming schools. It identified eight key elements that any successful reform effort must contain. Those elements are:

- higher standards for all students
- accurate assessments to measure what students know and can do
- challenging curricula with real-world applications
- competent and inspired teachers
- leading-edge instructional technology
- a culture of continuous improvement
- accountability tools that measure schools' performance
- supportive communities

The Foundation also realized that effective reform takes place on the ground — at the local level. WorldClass Schools is consequently designed to provide local business leaders with the information and tools that they need to advocate for reform initiatives in their own districts based on the framework of the eight elements.

The success of WorldClass Schools reflects the creative initiative of local business leaders. It rejects the notion of "one-size-fits-all" and requires local leaders to take risks. WorldClass Schools participants have moved into leadership positions — both formal and informal — in districts across Florida. Many have been elected to local school boards and several have even been elected to state offices. They have brought about innovative programs in many districts particularly in support of professional development and enhanced technology use.

Columbia Group organizations broker both resources and ideas. They use private sector investments and intellectual capital to develop innovative and replicable programs that bring solid results.

Tennessee Tomorrow:

In the mid-1990s, the staff at Tennessee Tomorrow recognized that many towns in rural areas in the state were struggling to keep up with changing technologies, and were confronted with increasingly limited funding due to federal and state cut-backs. It seemed clear that the solution to these concerns was not to be found outside of these communities but rather within them. These communities needed assistance in identifying existing resources, thinking strategically about challenges and resources in new ways, and, instead of seeing neighboring communities as competitors,working with them as potential collaborators. Tennessee Tomorrow created a program to help rural communities do just that.

In 1996, Tennessee Tomorrow launched the Association of Community Partnerships. The partnerships are between local employers, school boards, government agencies, financial institutions, utilities, technology providers, chambers of commerce and citizens. Their focus is promoting lifelong learning, supporting workforce development, improving the quality of life, and reducing the cost of government. The Association provides technical assistance, offers training, and organizes focus groups on key issues in the communities. The partnerships have brought new vitality to many Tennessee communities.

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence:

The Prichard Committee set an ambitious goal in 1984 when it decided to hold simultaneous town forums in every school district across the state on the evening of November 15. The forums were more successful than the planners had hoped for. Twenty thousand people came out that evening to talk about what they wanted for their schools and their children. The forums captured legislators' attention and began laying the groundwork for collective action. People were discovering and realizing the power of their voices.

There has been no looking back from that night in November. The Prichard Committee continues to bring people together and provide them with the skills to become active participants in the civic process through such programs as the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership and Parents and Teachers Talking Together.

Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education & A+ Education Foundation of Alabama:

Both the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) and A+ in Alabama understand the importance of ensuring that everyone has a voice in reforming schools. Too often, even at the local level, decisions that can have a significant impact on teachers are made without any participation by or input from the teachers themselves, leaving them feeling isolated and disempowered. Both GPEE and A+ have instituted programs that give teachers a chance to speak out.

GPEE, in conjunction with SERVE, conducted Teacher Dialogue Forums. Forum participants examined research, shared views, and discussed how to shape policy and practice in the teaching profession. Some participants initiated similar sessions in their own schools with their colleagues. SERVE prepared a report highlighting the issues that surfaced during the Forums and distributed it to policymakers across Georgia.

Responding to the same need, A+ has created the Alabama Teachers Forum. The Forum provides a place for teachers to ask questions, to share their experiences and opinions and to learn from one another. It has gained momentum and expanded beyond its original scope. With A+, the Teachers Forum annually sponsors an Outstanding Educators' Symposium to provide outstanding teachers with the leadership skills they need to become advocates for reform in their own communities.

The work of Columbia Group organizations is motivated by the realization that our democratic institutions depend on an educated populace for their success. Thus, they encourage and support discussion, dialogue and debate among diverse members of the community.

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Council for A Better Louisiana:
The Council for A Better Louisiana is developing a new initiative that seeks to shape the legislative agenda for education reform. With the development of curriculum standards and an accountability plan, Louisiana has started down the arduous path of education reform. These are essential first steps but by themselves will not complete the journey to reform. State leaders have not yet acted on the fact that improved student learning requires improved teaching. To ensure that Louisiana's students have the quality teaching they will need to reach the new standards, CABL has created the Forum for Education Excellence.

Co-chaired by leading businessmen, the Forum for Education Excellence's bringing together leaders from across Louisiana to look at teaching — how teachers are trained, how they're supported and how they can be helped to excel. Forum members will examine colleges of education and professional development practices and make suggestions about future policy and practices.

The Forum expects to release its first report on teachers in March 2000, immediately prior to the legislative session. The explicit intent of the Forum is to influence policymakers — to bring attention to issues of teacher quality and to put pressure on policymakers to make the decisions that will ensure that every child has a qualified teacher.

Public School Forum of North Carolina:
Since the late 1980s, the Public School Forum of North Carolina has conducted study groups every other year. These study groups, comprised of the Forum's 60-member board, spend a full year gathering information, analyzing, debating and eventually building consensus around recommendations to address critical educational issues in North Carolina. The Forum's board includes key policymakers, including the chairs of the state's House and Senate education and education appropriation committees and the state Superintendent of Public Instruction. Because the study group process is so thorough and collaborative and its members are key stakeholders, the groups' reports are influential on state policy. The study groups give policymakers an opportunity to examine complex issues away from a partisan arena and build consensus on educationally sound strategies to address them. In large part because of this consensus, every study group has resulted in the introduction of legislation that includes all or most of the group's recommendations. Among other results, study groups led to the implementation of statewide accountability measures in 1989, additional funding for small and poor schools (in the current year, new funding for these schools totaled more than $86 million), and the establishment of the School Technology Fund.

In its report, *The Things That Matter*, the most recent study group examines the state's school funding system. The constitutionality of the current funding system has been challenged in court by both poor and wealthy districts. A decision by the North Carolina Supreme Court is expected in 2000. The study group determined that the state can and should improve the funding system. It proposed a series of recommendations that will align funding with students' needs and connect it to other reform initiatives. Regardless of the court's decision, the study group's recommendations can serve as a blueprint for a more equitable system of funding in North Carolina.

Columbia Group organizations draw on research and best practices to develop programs that have become widely adopted throughout their states, and to influence directly the formulation of state policy.

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Facing the Future

Columbia Group organizations have, in their relatively short histories, demonstrated integrity, flexibility, and durability. They have learned how to function effectively in volatile and sometimes difficult political environments. They have been innovative in developing approaches to complex issues and focused in seeking to win support for these approaches. Members of the network have directly affected education policy in their own states, they have shared their ideas with one another, and consequently they have seeded promising practices throughout the region. Each is now a respected promoter of systemic state-wide reform of public education. The success of these organizations has inspired groups in other states — Colorado, Oklahoma and Ohio notably — to model nascent reform organizations on the example set by Columbia Group members.

The various members of the Columbia Group were conceived as part of a general need that business felt to change the environment in the states in which they were based or had significant operations. Most of these organizations were created to work for improved education. In some cases Columbia Group organizations were begun for other purposes and their work embraced such issues as tax and fiscal policy, more efficient government, and economic development. As better education became increasingly recognized as a powerful force in the continued viability of the South's changing economy, these organizations moved quickly to devote an increasing portion of their resources and efforts to defining and helping to resolve education concerns.

In a relatively short time, each of the Columbia Group members has developed and is implementing comprehensive education reform strategies, among them curriculum revision, standards, accountability, professional development, and parent and community engagement that, in their scope and reach, transcend the traditional "business agenda" for educational improvement. Business continues to be the major supporter of these efforts because many firms now realize that a diversified economy, technological adeptness, successful pursuit of new global markets and the elimination of racial disparities in income and achievement are essential for their viability. Businesses recognize that they depend on employees and consumers who have not just been to school but are, in fact, well-educated. Columbia Group organizations consequently are able to make strategic use of business resources in the form of contributions and grants to promote an education reform agenda that will benefit not only business but the state as a whole.

The Columbia Group and its members are in the middle of a journey. Their success in helping to fashion reformed systems of public education to produce better outcomes for all students depends on their ability to stay the course — to continue to draw on and to refine the characteristics that have made them successful. It also depends upon circumstances and factors that are, to some extent, beyond their control. These include staffing, funding, and the progress of reform.

Columbia Group organizations have small staffs to grapple with increasingly complicated and far-reaching issues. Dealing with these issues requires different capacities: expert knowledge of education, program development, analysis, writing, design, organizing, communications, and public engagement are all separate skills and all are required for effective resolution of education reform questions. These issues are multiplying and, at the same time, becoming more intricate. Visionary leadership, complemented by knowledgeable, competent and devoted staff, has fueled Columbia Group organizations' successes. Maintaining momentum, in the face of growing complexity, may require enhanced capacity. Finding appropriate additional staff and the resources to support them will challenge members of the network.

Resources are always an issue. Business has been the organizations' major supporter. Their future is consequently tied to a continuing perception by business that its own success remains inextricably intertwined with the success of public education in the region. It also depends on business' continued ability to make investments in reform. Downturns in the economy may threaten the continued base of support for some of the Columbia Group organizations. So, too, can the acceleration of mergers and consolidations in the various industries that support Columbia Group organizations. Some members of the group have already realized a reduction in support that is attributable to the acquisition of state-based enterprises by large national or international corporations.

The trajectory of reform will also affect future support for Columbia Group organizations. The successes that they have had in promoting improved teaching and learning lead to expectations of continuing, and greater, victories. These small non-profits have, in essence, tied their futures to the decisions of state legislatures and the performance of scores of local school districts, to policies and practices that they may influence but in no sense control. Should these systems fail to progress or, as is more likely, progress unevenly and in small increments, movements to reform public education may lose the support of both business and the citizenry. Competing strategies to improve education, including privatization through vouchers or other means, may threaten the viability of some education reform groups.

Columbia Group organizations have, however, withstood these challenges before. They have weathered economic turndowns, propped up wavering supporters and faced down those who would strip vitally-needed resources from public education systems. They have done so, in part, because they have been able to anticipate issues and develop effective mechanisms to deal with these issues. Their work has been distinguished by commitment to change and pragmatism in bringing it about. In this work, they have drawn on the Columbia Group network to learn from similar experiences that others have had in different states.

The Columbia Group network has, to date, been most helpful to its members in enabling them to confront issues in their own states. As reform becomes more widespread and complex, many of the same issues reappear in state after state. Recognizing this, the Columbia Group network has decided to experiment with collaborative approaches to these issues, addressing them regionally.

Collaboration has had two significant successes in the last few years. First, four of the organizations worked together on Project Connect, an effort to study and capture lessons from the wave of new charter schools emerging in five states of the Southeast. The project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education and coordinated by the North Carolina Public School Forum, also attempted to build links between charter schools and traditional public schools. A report, *Public Policy and Charter Schools*, has resulted from this work.

Second, in 1997, the Columbia Group undertook a joint detailed analysis of the status of teaching in the Southeast. After intensive investigation and data review, the network issued a report, *Teachers & Teaching in the Southeast*, with support from the BellSouth Foundation. The report looked at regional needs, analyzed state policies, profiled the region's teachers, projected demand for new teachers and made recommendations, aligned with those of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, to improve the supply and quality of the South's teachers.

Policy recommendations were only a beginning. Again, working with the BellSouth Foundation, the Columbia Group has been a major actor in creating the Southeast Center on Teacher Quality. The new center has, in its first year of operation, demonstrated real potential to promote new ways to ensure that all students in the region have access to competent, caring and committed teachers. The Columbia Group's accomplishments in this regard are a first, important step in stimulating a multi-state approach to improved teaching.

The Columbia Group network has demonstrated its willingness and ability to consider emerging issues on a regional basis; it now must determine the extent to which cooperative endeavors among these organizations across state boundaries will lead to an effective and distinct "regional approach" to reform while simultaneously enhancing efforts in each state. As in other instances, a pragmatic grasp of possibilities will determine the network's response to the opportunities offered by increased collaboration.

William Faulkner once observed that, for the South, the past is not dead; it is not yet past. The education reform efforts of the Columbia Group, spurred by business interest in and need for modernization, speak to a different South, one where the past is recognized as past and the future, as uncertain as it may be, is unfolding.

Contact Information and Publications

A+ Education Foundation of Alabama
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Teaching and Learning: Meeting the Challenge of High Standards (1999)
For The Sake of Our Children: The Future of Alabama's Public Schools (1996)
Drafting a Blueprint for Successful Alabama Schools (1993)

Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation
Jane McNabb
P.O. Box 11309
Tallahassee, FL 32302-3309
850-521-1232
www.worldclass.flchamber.com

World Class Works: The First Four Years (1999)
No More Excuses: What Business Must Do to Help Improve Florida's Schools (1994)

Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
Tom Upchurch
235 Peachtree Street, Suite 900
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
404-223-2280
www.gpee.org

School Safety and Discipline: Enhancing Learning and Averting Misbehavior (1999)
Using Test Data to Improve Student Learning (1997)
The Next Generation School Project - 1998 Evaluation Report

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in Kentucky
Bob Sexton
PO Box 1658
Lexington, Kentucky 40588-1658
606-233-9849
www.prichardcommittee.org

Gaining Ground: Hard Work and High Expectations for Kentucky Schools, (1999)
Each & Every Child: Your Guide to Testing and School Accountability in Kentucky, (2000)
Kentucky School Updates: A Parent/Citizen Guide for 1999-2000

Council for A Better Louisiana
Harold Suire
PO Box 4308
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4308
504-344-2225
www.cabl.org

Fighting Poverty, Building Community (1999)
In Public View: The People's Report Card on Louisiana Government and Politics (1995)
Louisiana's Fiscal Alternatives Revisited (1994)

Public Education Forum of Mississippi
William Lewis
120 North Congress, Suite 800
Jackson, Mississippi 39201
601-353-5488
www.publiceducationforum.org

Educator Pipeline (1997)
Quality Teachers, Every Child's Birthright (1998)

Public School Forum of North Carolina
John Dornan
3739 National Drive, Suite 210
Raliegh, NC 27612
919-781-6833
www.ncforum.org

Things That Matter (1999)
Profession in Jeopardy (1996)
Series on School Choice: Chartering for Excellence (1998)
The Choices We Make (1999)
Public Policy and Charter Schools (2000)

South Carolina Chamber Excellence in Education Council
Carol Stewart
1201 Main St., Suite 1810
Columbia, SC 29201-3254
803-799-4601
www.sccc.org

Teacher Quality: Focus on Reform (1999)

Tennessee Tomorrow
George Yowell
333 Commerce St.
Nashville, TN 37201-3300
615-214-3073
www.tntomorrow.org

Tennessee Economic Development Guide: Special Section on Tennessee Tomorrow
Tennesseans' Attitudes Toward Learning and the Workplace
Partnerships for the 21st Century: Lessons Learned

The Columbia Group
www.columbiagroup.org

Teachers and Teaching in the SouthEast: A Special Columbia Group Report

Conception/Writing: Robert Kronley Research: Scott Emerick, Claire Hanley Graphic Design/Production: Beth Quick

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